



Morning Alert - Friday, October 13, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that DOS spokesperson Nauert announced on Thursday that the U.S. will withdraw from UNESCO on account of its anti-Israel bias. All commercial networks led with reports on a press conference held by comedian Akira Shimizu last night after his son was arrested on the charge of possessing stimulants.

Major front-page items in national papers included the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from UNESCO, updates on the general election campaign, and a scandal engulfing Kobe Steel Ltd. over the falsification of data on some of the materials it supplied.

SECURITY

USFJ suspends CH-53 operations for four days

Asahi front-paged instructions issued on Thursday by the Okinawa Area Coordinator, Lt. Gen. Nicholson, to suspend for 96 hours all flight operations of CH-53 helicopters based in Okinawa in response to the latest incident involving the aircraft that occurred on Thursday near the Northern Training Area. The decision came following USFJ Deputy Commander Chiarotti's meeting with Defense Minister Onodera earlier in the day, in which the Japanese official asked for the suspension of flights by the cargo helicopter until its safety is fully confirmed. At the beginning of the meeting, Onodera called for the swift provision of information including the cause of the mishap, preventive measures, and additional steps for safe helicopter operations. "The accident occurred after a series of accidents involving Ospreys," said Onodera. "The same type of helicopter crashed at a local university 13 years ago.... It is truly regrettable that the incident caused tremendous anxiety among the people of Okinawa." In reply, Major General Chiarotti stated: "We fully understand the Okinawan

people's concern and anxiety. Safety is our top priority." Other papers filed similar stories.

Mainichi and Tokyo Shimbun ran editorials on the incident, underscoring that repeated accidents involving U.S. military aircraft demonstrate the disproportionate security burden borne by the people of Okinawa. Both editorials called for SOFA revisions so that local police can investigate such incidents.

POLITICS

U.S. helicopter mishap in Okinawa to have impact on general election campaign

Most papers reported that the Abe administration is busy running "damage control" in response to the recent helicopter accident in Okinawa out of fear that it will give local voters a negative impression of the central government's commitment to addressing base issues in the southernmost prefecture. LDP Policy Research Council Chairman Kishida, who visited Okinawa yesterday to campaign for LDP candidates, called off his planned stump speeches and instead surveyed the accident site and met with Governor Onaga. The former foreign minister said to the governor: "The incident is truly regrettable and should not have happened." Pointing out that all four LDP candidates in Okinawa were defeated by their opposition rivals in single-seat districts in the last general election, Asahi said local LDP officials are increasingly concerned about the same thing happening this time. They are also worried that LDP candidates' performance in the upcoming race will have a large impact on the Nago mayoral election in February and the gubernatorial election next fall.

Ruling coalition trying not to be overly optimistic about election prospects

All papers reported that senior ruling party officials are trying to downplay the results of the major news outlets' public opinion surveys pointing to ruling candidates' strong performance in the ongoing general election campaign. LDP Secretary General Nikai issued an "emergency notice" on Thursday to LDP candidates nationwide warning them against becoming overly optimistic and calling for them to continue campaigning vigorously. The LDP and the Komeito party are afraid that in response to the looming possibility of a landslide victory by the Abe administration, some undecided voters may be tempted to support opposition candidates as "underdogs" so as not to allow the ruling coalition to win too many votes.

Nikkei delved into the reasons for LDP candidates' apparent strength despite the public's increasing discontent with the Abe administration (support for the cabinet was 37%; nonsupport, 48%), speculating that voters critical of the premier are split between two main opposition parties – the Party of Hope and the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan. Noting that the Party of Hope is apparently failing to command strong support, the papers conjectured that some voters are critical of its leader Tokyo Governor Koike for focusing on the national election and neglecting her primary responsibility of managing the metropolitan government. The daily also attributed the LDP's strength

to its “election machine,” a formidable volunteer army of canvassers that has been maintained by elected LDP officials especially in the countryside for decades.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe says Trump to meet with abductees’ families

Most Thursday evening papers took up a stump speech delivered in Niigata earlier in the day by Prime Minister Abe, who disclosed that when holding a summit with President Trump in New York on Sept. 21, he asked the U.S. leader to meet with the families of the Japanese abductees, including the parents of Megumi Yokota, during his trip to Japan. The premier said the President replied that he will meet with them and do his best to rescue the abductees.

According to Sankei, Sakie Yokota, the mother of Megumi, commented on the possibility of meeting with President Trump by saying on Thursday: “We would be extremely grateful if we are given a chance to meet with him.” The paper said while welcoming the President’s reported willingness to meet with them, other abductee families are concurrently hoping that the USG, in coordination with the GOJ, will take concrete steps to bring back their loved ones from North Korea given that no progress has been made on this front even though they have met with former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush in the past.

U.S., Japan worried about presence of DPRK diplomat in key UN office

Sankei wrote from New York that a North Korean diplomat has recently been assigned to the UN’s Department of Political Affairs (DPA), noting that the USG and the GOJ were opposed to the idea on account of the potential for leakage of critical intelligence, such as data related to internal deliberations on UN sanctions resolutions on the DPRK. While noting that the Korean diplomat secured his position in the DPA through the “junior professional officer” program, the article said the U.S., Japan, and others are calling for the UN secretariat to ensure thorough measures to safeguard classified information.

Japan’s draft UN resolution on nuclear abolition fails to mention nuke ban treaty

Thursday evening’s Asahi claimed in its lead story that in drafting the annual UN General Assembly resolution calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons, the GOJ has chosen not to mention the Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), which was cited by the Nobel Committee in awarding this year’s Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The paper noted that the tone of the language on nuclear disarmament and nuclear arms control in this year’s draft appears to be weaker than in previous ones but stronger on security aspects, such as North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats. As a result, NWC proponents are reportedly displeased and may not support the adoption of the Japanese draft in the vote slated for December.

In a follow-up report this morning, Asahi said the draft reflects Japan’s reliance on the U.S. “nuclear umbrella,” quoting a MOFA source as saying: “It was necessary to incorporate in the draft such

elements as national security and the importance of nuclear nonproliferation in view of the situation in North Korea.”

Mainichi ran a similar story, quoting a NWC proponent as saying: “The chances are high that Japan altered the language in response to pressure from the United States.”

